

Signs in Action: Tarot as a Self-Organized System

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Abstract: From a semiotic viewpoint, Tarot has been described as a mere artifact with pictorial cards being signifiers in a symbolic sense. This paper reconceptualizes the process-structure of Tarot by placing it in a three-fold framework that merges semiotics with systems-theoretical and cybernetic perspectives. Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic logic embedded in the action of signs, or semiosis in mind and nature, serves as a point of departure. By addressing Tarot from the position of general systems theory it is possible to describe Tarot dynamics by means of a sort of indexical connection to its signified. The latter, albeit functioning in a symbolic sense as an archetypal field of Jungian collective unconscious, is nevertheless capable of producing real effects at the level of human emotions, cognitions and habitual behaviors. The interpretation of symbols as the Peircean category of Thirdness creates, by virtue of mediation, a feedback loop, that is it generates conditions of possibility for self-organization. The previously unconscious, that is as yet out of conscious awareness, contents of one's mind become available to human knowing. The process of reading and interpretation contributes to, in a pragmatic sense, the creation of meanings for mental representations, the former inferred from the symbolism embedded in Tarot pictures. As such, Tarot as a self-organized system has the potential to provide epistemic access to the Peircean virtual Real, affirming, in a way, some contemporary debates of cognitive science.

It is honorable to be an epigone of Peirce. (Shimony, 1993/II: 245.)

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